

Opening Statement Chairman John Shimkus
Environment Subcommittees Hearing “DOE’s Role in Managing Civilian
Radioactive Waste”

June 1, 2011

(Remarks Prepared for Delivery)

I call this hearing to order and recognize myself for 5 minutes. This is part of our ongoing effort at the committee to make certain we are providing safe and sustainable long term storage of high level spent nuclear fuel. Specifically today we focus our attention on the part the Department of Energy plays and the process by which decisions have been made when it comes to a long term repository.

No matter if you support the continued use of nuclear energy or if you don’t, we have a responsibility to deal with existing spent nuclear fuel and high level waste materials from our nation’s defense complex. As we sit in this room, spent nuclear fuel from commercial power plants is piling up and remains scattered around the country in two-thirds of our states.

It was always the determination that the federal government – not the individual states and not the utility companies – would take responsibility for the safe storage of spent fuel and other nuclear materials. After a careful search, we found a scientifically proven, geologically ideal site to store these materials. That’s on secure, federal property, in a remote desert, deep under Yucca Mountain.

Now we are at a crossroads. Politics, not science, is driving the debate. It’s time for us to decide if we will keep our end of the deal with the nation’s citizens by delivering exactly what they’ve been paying for all these years, or if we’ll waste rate payer’s and taxpayer money by failing to deliver on our end of the contract.

Recently the Government Accountability Office released a report examining the results of the Obama Administration’s withdraw of the Yucca Mountain license application. What GAO found was this unilateral decision comes at a cost of 15 billion dollars so far - 9.5 billion of it directly collected from every American’s electricity bill. But the fleecing of taxpayers won’t end there. GAO estimates taxpayers are already on the hook for \$15 billion and an additional \$500 million dollars for each year the project is delayed beyond 2020. Meanwhile, the U.S. Treasury will be paying out taxpayer dollars, not ratepayer dollars in judgments to utilities for DOE’s breach of contract.

Billions of dollars and over 30 years of research from our nation’s top scientists were jettisoned – not for technical or safety reasons – but as the GAO’s report stated, “social and political opposition to a permanent repository, not technical issues, is the key obstacle.”

When I visited Yucca Mountain last month I heard firsthand the overwhelming support from local residents and officials from the seven surrounding counties. We will hear firsthand of that support today from those representing locals closest to Yucca Mountain.

Locals who raise families in that area and know it is safe. Those who would be directly affected the most took it upon themselves to ensure the safety of their children and grandchildren through an independent scientific investigation program. And what they found was high-level nuclear fuel could be stored at Yucca Mountain while keeping their water supply safe – a major concern particularly for locals. They also know it has the ability to infuse desperately needed jobs both directly and indirectly related to the Yucca Mountain site.

We must not let the political games stop us from keeping a promise to taxpayers. The licensing process for Yucca Mountain must legally continue so that we can give the American people the surety of a safe, centralized, permanent storage site for spent nuclear fuel.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for being here today to give us their perspective on moving forward. I look forward to their verbal testimony and willingness to answer any questions members may have.

I yield back the balance of my time.